Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages | Commissariat aux langues officielles

Newsroom



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Canada's official languages on the Internet: Key to the knowledge economy**

In a new study published this morning, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Dr. Dyane Adam, concludes that the Government of Canada still has neither an integrated strategy nor an overall perspective to increase the presence of Canada's official languages on the Internet, this in spite of the fact that the Commissioner presented a series of recommendations on this issue in an initial study published in 1999.

The study, entitled *French on the Internet: Key to the Canadian Identity and the Knowledge Economy*, first shows that fewer than half of the recommendations originally made by the Commissioner have been followed up in any significant fashion. Secondly, the study examines the current state of affairs, proposes a coherent governance framework and sets out three strategic initiatives aimed at making the Internet a social, economic, and cultural tool that fully respects Canada's linguistic duality.

Canada must act in this regard at both the national and international levels. "It is not only a question of respecting our identity as Canadians that is at stake, but also the image that Canada would like to project to the world. We must also remember that the Internet and language industries are increasingly important factors in economic growth," notes the Commissioner.

According to Statistics Canada, Francophones in Canada are less likely than Anglophones to use the Internet and are less satisfied with the content available in their language. The Internet is also a catalyst for major change in the linguistic, cultural, and economic character of Canadian society. Furthermore, it has had a great impact on how the federal government delivers services to Canadians. Internationally, the linguistic diversity of Internet content has attracted attention for both cultural and economic reasons.

The Commissioner is therefore asking that the federal government develop an integrated strategy and invest the appropriate funds to address these challenges. To this end, Dr. Adam recommends that the Minister of Industry create a Canadian Advisory Committee on Official Languages on the Internet to advise the government on the steps it should take to ensure the growth of the knowledge economy by promoting Canada's official languages on the Internet. The Treasury Board Secretariat must also play a key role by directing and coordinating any action taken by the Government of Canada with regard to official languages on the Internet, especially in light of the Government On-Line initiative.

The other recommendations contained in the report are structured according to three strategic initiatives:

- The recommendations belonging to the first strategic initiative aim to accelerate the creation of French-language content on the Internet, in order to achieve a critical mass of content in that language. These recommendations also pertain to the language quality of federal sites, the digitization of federal collections, and the adoption of a strategy to support content development in the private sector. Canadian Heritage must continue its work and invest even greater effort in

this area.

- The recommendations in the second strategic initiative focus on support for research and development for the language industries and the provision of technolinguistic tools over the Internet (for example, writing and translation aids, terminology banks, and bilingual search modules).

- The third and final strategic initiative is devoted to foreign policy issues. The study recommends that the federal government take immediate measures to ensure the equal representation of both official languages on Internet sites maintained by foreign embassies in Canada and the international organizations in which Canada is a full member. The Commissioner is also asking that the government do more to encourage the use of the Internet in developing countries of the Francophonie and take steps to further the creation of an Interamerican Network to promote English, French, Spanish and Portuguese in an integrated America.

"The Government of Canada must put in place concrete measures to promote linguistic duality on the Internet as an economic engine and as a window on Canadian culture and values. This is a unique opportunity to affirm our identity and to develop the knowledge economy. The Government of Canada can and must take up the challenge!" concluded the Commissioner.

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